

Remarks

Claims 1-15 are pending. With this Amendment, claims 1, 3, 4, and 15 are amended, and claims 2 and 6 are canceled. Claims 1, 3-5, and 7-15 remain pending in the above-cited application upon entry of the current amendments.

Applicants request reconsideration and allowance of the application in view of the present amendments and following remarks.

Allowable Subject Matter

According to the Office Action, claims 4-6 stand objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Based upon such indication of allowable subject matter, Applicants amend base claim 1 by incorporating the subject matter of claim 6 and intervening claim 2 into claim 1. Accordingly, dependent claims 2 and 6 are canceled, claim 3 is amended to correct claim dependency, and claim 4 is amended for claim term consistency. Applicants decline rewriting dependent claim 4 in independent form.

Accordingly, Applicants request that the objection of claims 4-6 for being dependent from a rejected base claim be withdrawn.

Based on the indication of allowability of claim 6 and the similarity of claims 1 and 15, Applicants amend independent claim 15 by incorporating the subject matter of claim 6 into claim 15.

Accordingly, Applicants submit that, similar to amended claim 1, amended claim 15 is also allowable.

Claim rejections under 35 U.S.C. §§ 102 and 103

As discussed above, based on allowable subject matter indicated in the present Office Action, independent claims 1 and 15 are amended in a way believed to make such claims allowable. Because independent claims 1 and 15 are amended in this way, all of the claim rejections in the present Office Action under §§ 102 and 103 are moot.

Accordingly, Applicants request that such rejections be withdrawn.

Record of Interview

A telephonic interview was requested on February 2, 2004, between Applicants' attorney, Paul J. Parins, and Examiner Edward M. Johnson regarding the above-cited patent application. In particular, a substantive discussion with regards to claim 1 was requested. Examiner Johnson indicated that a meaningful discussion was unavailable since the subject matter of the application would need to be reviewed prior to such a discussion. Thus, the present amendments, remarks, and request for reconsideration made herein place the claims and the present application into condition for allowance based upon allowability stated in the present Office Action and are not in view of this request for an interview.

Conclusion

Approval of the application and allowance of the claims is earnestly solicited. In the event that a phone conference between the Examiner and the Applicant's undersigned attorney would help resolve any remaining issues in the application, the Examiner is invited to contact said attorney at (651) 275-9831.

Respectfully Submitted,

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